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USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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HAM IT UP

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PROCUREMENT SECTION
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Country Or Country Style. Should the term "country ham" mean the meat was processed in the country--or that it was processed a special way to give it a distinct flavor? That's what USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service is trying to decide-- so it's asking for consumer views. A group of ham producers has proposed changing Federal meat inspection rules to set minimum ingredient, aging and curing requirements for ham and pork shoulders labeled "country" or "country style." Current rules allow the term "country" only on products actually prepared on a farm or in the country. "Country style" products need not be produced in such rural locations. Copies of the proposal, which was in the July 17 Federal Register, are available from the Meat and Poultry Inspection Administrative Group, C&MS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Send two copies of your comments by September 15 to the Hearing Clerk, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF TASTE

There's More To Taste Than Meets The Tongue. Human taste buds distinguish only four taste sensations: sour, salty, bitter, and sweet. But, according to a study reported by the Extension Service at Rutgers University, taste is largely smell: our first impression of food is the aroma. Then there is tactile response. Texture is part of this (the smoothness of mashed potatoes) as is temperature (a lukewarm soft drink just doesn't "taste" right). Some people have an acute sense of taste or a keener sensitivity to one type of taste. Some people are ageusic--taste blind--to some tastes; many people experience variances in their taste sensitivity during the day. Concentration of a flavor and the combination of flavors are other taste factors. These turn the four basic tastes into many fascinating sensations, which have inspired a good deal of human activity--from Marco Polo's spice-hunting voyages to the modern food scientist's work to develop new ranges of test tube flavors. Why look for man-made flavors? One reason is that in processing foods some of the original flavor is lost. Another is the competition for use of land for growing our food: there aren't enough strawberry patches in the world to furnish fruit for all the strawberry ice cream we want to eat. So we stretch things with synthetic (blends of natural flavors plus an accentuator) or artificial (flavors made from scratch in the laboratory) flavorings.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Out Of The City--Into The Woods. Everybody talks about the environment these days--but not everybody knows just what he should be doing about it. Part of the reason is that people need to know more about their whole environment, both natural and man-made, and its interactions, in order to find workable solutions to environmental problems. These problems affect city and country, young and old alike. Education in the outdoors can provide part of this knowledge. The USDA's Forest Service is helping with its Environmental Education program which takes people--teachers and students, principals and school board members, families and groups--out to the National Forests to learn of the interrelationships of our environment. Teacher workshops use problem solving, simulation and data gathering techniques to make their points. The program also includes ways to develop teacher-learning areas on school grounds, in city parks, and ordinary city blocks. Program materials are being prepared and will be available to educators in the fall. The environment should become as much a part of basic education as reading, writing and 'rithmetic. With Forest Service help, maybe it will!

OUT OF THE LAUNDRY TUB

Into The Confusion. Modern woman no longer needs to be elbow-deep in the laundry tub. But many a modern woman is knee-deep in the problem of choosing, from a confusing array of soaps and detergents on the market, the right one for her family's laundry. Compounding the confusion is the variety of fabrics found in today's laundry basket. And the type of fabric is not the only consideration; the kind of soil to be removed, the colorfastness of the dye, the hardness of the water, and the type of washer used are also involved. Knowing how to choose and use soaps and detergents is essential for good results in home laundry. A USDA bulletin, "Soaps and Detergents for Home Laundry" (G-139) can help you select the right cleaning agent and use it more effectively. Single free copies of the bulletin are available from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

SUMMERTIME -- CANNED OR FROZEN

Keep "Out Of Season" Foods "In." The luscious fruits and vegetables from your summer orchard and garden need never be "out of season." If you have a freezer or a canner, you can keep summertime on your dinner table all year. Freezing is one of the simplest and least time-consuming ways to preserve foods at home. It keeps the natural color, fresh flavor, and nutritive values of most fruits and vegetables well and holds them ready to serve on short notice. Freezing, of course, is not the only preserving method. Home canning, recalling the pre-freezer days of colorful and mouthwatering rows of shining jars on the pantry shelf, is an old but current way to hold on to summertime. For some foods and homes, canning is the more satisfactory and economical method. If you plan to freeze, can, or both this summer, two USDA publications may be of help to you: "Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables" (G-8) and "Home Freezing of Fruits and Vegetables" (G-10). Each booklet gives detailed directions for preserving, the proper equipment, and tips on keeping the food safe to eat during preparation and storage. The booklets are available for 20 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

ORANGE JUICE ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

Look Into Our Crystals. Orange juice lovers may soon be enjoying a little space age magic: orange juice made from crystals. The crystals, which dissolve readily in cold water to make a good-tasting, nutritious orange juice, are made from commercial frozen orange concentrate. A very small amount of food additive, methyl cellulose, is added to the concentrate so it can be whipped into a stiff, stable foam. The foam is laid down as a smooth sheet on a stainless steel belt. Hot air blown over the moving layer removes moisture leaving dry crystals which are packaged in moisture-proof containers. Because the crystals are lightweight and require no refrigeration, they offer shipping and storage advantages--they were included among the food items aboard Apollo flights 13 and 14. The process for making the crystals, developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture and Florida Citrus Commission scientists, is now being used to make crystals commercially. Presently they are being produced for the Department of Defense with manufacture for the retail trade expected to start in the near future.

GARDENING IN A BOTTLE

House Plants - Without Soil. Most people know certain plants will root in water. But many do not know that some plants can grow in water year-round. All you need to start a bottle garden are a bottle, water, and cut limbs or stems from selected plants. According to plant scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, any waterproof container can be used. The bottle and the plant should be scrubbed with warm soapy water to control green algae. Leaves below the water line should be removed. Some plants wilt during the first few days, but they soon recover. While you enjoy the foilage for its decoration, the limbs begin to root and become "slips." These "slips" can be potted in soil and used as house plants or as bedding plants in your garden next summer. Some plants which adapt well to bottle gardening are geranium, impatiens, wax begonia, hibiscus, coleus, aucuba, ivy, aglaonema, and grape ivy.

GREEN IS THE COLOR OF HAPPINESS

If You Are Among The 95 Percent. In a recent poll, people were asked to choose from 26 things those which they consider important to their happiness. Ninety-five percent wanted green grass and trees most -- above their desires for good neighbors, modern kitchens, nearby shopping areas, or good schools. If you agree with that majority, it is nice to know that you don't need to be an expert to grow a good green lawn. But it does take work and adherence to sound establishment and maintenance practices. In the publication, "Better Lawns," USDA experts give details on these practices, such as how and when to start a new lawn and how to renovate and care for an established one. The booklet describes some types of grasses -- and some other ground cover plants -- suitable for various climates, soils, and yard topography. The booklet also discusses some of the problems -- insects, diseases, and others -- that might develop. Copies of "Better Lawns" (G-51) are available for 25 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

PUTTING THE BLUSH ON TOMATOES

Refrigerate After Ripening. If you buy tomatoes that aren't quite ripe, let them ripen in a warm place and then refrigerate. The cold temperatures may keep them from ripening later on.

PLENTIFUL FOODS FOR AUGUST

For Good Summer Eating. Among the items on the August Plentiful Foods List are those juicy fruits and crisp vegetables that make summer worth waiting for -- fresh pears, plums, (including purple plums), sweet corn, tomatoes, celery, and carrots. These can be accompanied to the table by other budget-stretching ideas from the List: wheat products (giving special emphasis to the observance of August Is Sandwich Month), broiler-fryers, fluid milk, peanuts and peanut products, cranberry sauce and juice. Looking ahead to good eating in September, the Plentiful Foods List will include peanuts and peanut products, broiler-fryers, eggs, split peas, potatoes, fresh purple plums, and fresh pears.

IT TAKES GROUND WORK

Soils And Septic Tanks. Septic tank sewage disposal systems have been in use for decades in both rural and suburban communities. In recent years, their number has greatly increased as millions of people build houses beyond existing sewer lines. These homebuilders, of course, want a system that gives years of trouble-free service. To achieve this goal takes some advance planning and knowledge of the soil factors in the area. These factors include soil permeability -- the quality of soil that enables water and air to move through -- ground water level, kind of soil, and ground slope. Regardless how well the system is constructed and installed, it will not work properly in the wrong soil. USDA's Soil Conservation Service has prepared a booklet, "Soils and Septic Tanks," (AIB-349) which gives details on general construction of a septic tank disposal system, explains soil factors and their effect on the systems, and discusses the value of soil surveys in planning a satisfactory system. Single free copies of the publication are available from the Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

AS HARVEST DRAWS NEAR

Who's Ahead? Is it a race to see who will enjoy the harvest from your garden -- you or the bugs? A booklet from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Insects and Diseases of Vegetables in the Home Garden," can help you get an edge. The first thing is to identify your competition. Color illustrations and line drawings of many of these, along with brief descriptions and information on the range and damaging work of the pests are included in the booklet. And most important, it tells what can be done about the pests. Similar information is given on the diseases that may have invaded your garden. The booklet also points out -- and describes -- several insects in your garden that may be friendly -- such as damsel bugs or minute pirate bugs which destroy harmful insects. Single free copies of "Insects and Diseases of Vegetables in the Home Garden" (G-46) are available from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, Washington, D.C. 20250, or telephone DU8-5437. Please include your zipcode.